

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003120

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SCIRI LEADER AGREES TO COOPERATE ON CONSTITUTION,
SECURITY ISSUES

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford.

Reasons 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. The head of Iraq's strongest Shia Islamist party, Abdel Aziz al-Hakim, pledged to the Ambassador that his party would work in the spirit of consensus in achieving a constitution. It was not their intention to exclude any group. That said, he cautioned, Iraq's Shia want to be treated fairly and receive the same rights as everyone else. Ambassador pointed out the need for a "national compact" among Iraqis, which the constitution could provide.

Breaking the insurgency and decentralizing the reconstruction process are also top U.S. priorities in Iraq. Hakim highlighted that Iraqis are worried about security. He suggested creating security committees in the provinces as a means to combat insurgents. The Ambassador in turn cautioned that while the U.S. works to strengthen Iraqi security forces, militias could pose a danger to Iraq's longer-term future. Hakim agreed with the Ambassador's perspective that more reconstruction project decision-making should be left to local authorities. END SUMMARY.

Constitutional Negotiations

¶12. (C) Ambassador met with SCIRI head Abdul Aziz Hakim, Constitutional Committee Chair Sheikh Hammam Hammudi, and SCIRI members Mohammad al Mowla, Akram al Hakim, and Sa'ad Jawad on July 26. Ambassador opened the discussion by stating that Iraq needs a "national compact" among the Iraqi people, which should be the constitution. The constitution needs to bring in those Iraqis who do not see themselves as part of Iraq's future. Iraqis of all stripes, he said, including women, need to be brought into the constitutional process, emphasizing that equality and women's rights are of the utmost importance. This does not mean that Iraq needs an American system of equality, he stated, however, certain "universal systems" should be followed. In order to make this work, the support of Iraqi leaders who are not part of the TNA must be obtained.

¶13. (C) Hakim suggested that Iraq's future will come in two stages: transitional and constitutional. The first stage will end when the constitution is ratified. Participation and consensus of all Iraqis is very important in the first stage, especially if Iraqis are to meet the August 15 deadline for completing the constitution. Consensus will be achieved only if all parties are treated equally. (COMMENT: Hakim presumably was saying that predominantly Shia provinces should have the same right to form regional blocs as Kurdish provinces have. END COMMENT)

Security Issues

¶14. (C) Hakim emphasized how important the issue of security is to Iraqis now (SCIRI parliamentary leaders seated next to Hakim had urged him in Arabic to raise the issue). What Iraq needs, Hakim said, is to strengthen the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). Only security forces loyal to the Iraqi Government can assure lasting security in Iraq. Hakim also spoke of the need for unarmed security committees in each of the provinces. According to Hakim, neither the U.S. military nor the ISF are capable of protecting Iraqi civilians from violence now. Ambassador emphasized that the U.S. wanted to focus on increasing ISF capacity, calling it the USG's highest priority. Having militias in the provinces could lead to warlordism. If these security committees were unarmed, however, this option could be explored further.

Decentralized Reconstruction

15. (C) Ambassador said as many decisions on reconstruction as possible should be made at the local level, and the process should be decentralized. Local leaders should prioritize their lists of reconstruction projects, and the U.S. should try to help projects local leaders identify. He added that the U.S. would seek to use Iraqi firms where possible and practical. This would employ more Iraqis and give them ownership of the process. It would also cut costs, as U.S. companies must pay high overhead costs, especially for security. Hakim agreed with this approach and urged that we look for ways to accelerate the pace of reconstruction work.

16. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.

Khalilzad